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A

PLEA FOR THE REFORMATION
OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

LECTURE I.

THE CORRUPTED CHURCH DETECTED.

I AM about to enter upon a threefold expression of sentiment,—that of complaint, of desire, and of advice. To complain of the present Congregational Churches, to delineate what is to be desired in them, and to advise as to the best mode of accomplishing the good object of fully, fairly, and freely paying strict attention to apostolic precept and example in the constitution and order of our Churches. I will not make complaints of evils which are only partial in their extent, or which operate only in secrecy; but will procure the materials for lamentation from those doings which are public, general, and of which every one who is cognizant of our Churches (at least those in London) must be aware. I have no intention of

prying into secrets, or of pursuing faults into all the destructive range of their ramifications. Enough stares me in the face to warrant the conclusion that *the present Congregational Churches do not strictly adhere to apostolic rule.*

They walk by a perverted rule of their own devising, and not by that of the Apostles :—

I. In their neglect of Communion.

II. In paying a decided preference to the spirit of the world in their financial affairs ; and

III. In curtailing the means for the edification of their Churches.

The first remarkable dereliction from apostolic example appears in the non-observance of the Lord's Supper every Lord's day. The history of the early Churches in the New Testament intimates that they observed it every Lord's day (Acts ii. 42, xx. 7 ; 1 Cor. xi. 17—34). There are but few who will attempt to shield the true cause of the dereliction of duty from view, by controverting the propriety of so doing. But it is well known our Churches do not find it *convenient to attend to it so often.* But why should it be more convenient for our Churches to elevate one Lord's day in the month to the rank of communion days, than to commemorate their communion on every one of these days ? What should be the rule and limit of convenience but principle ? and what more suitable principles can we take in these matters than those which we find in the New Testament ? A dereliction of duty, from whatever cause it may arise, while it may prove in a given

instance the impossibility of the obedience, will not destroy the imperative character of the duty, or shield the delinquent from blame. And a Church of Christ, formed by means of a collection of persons who bear the image of the Redeemer, should constantly hold themselves in readiness to obey in all things. They should not by any means contentedly suffer themselves to be warped from their privileges by circumstances of their own creation. But, on the contrary, should unitedly present, by a reverential obedience to collective duties, a fit pattern, after which their members individually might safely copy, in their respective family and personal manifestations of obedience to God's will.

II. The spirit of the world predominates in their principal financial arrangements. I do not mean to object to Christians taking a lesson from the wise men of the world, when that is altogether compatible with their religious duties; nor do I make it a subject of complaint that they take care to commit their temporal matters, the carnal things of the Church, to a college of deacons, for I wish the same degree of wisdom were displayed in their other and more important matters. What I complain of in the financial arrangement is, that they partake of that which is worldly, so as to defeat, to a great extent, the grand object of their incorporation as Churches. The instance which I shall produce of this class of practical errors, is the system of seat-renting. That there should be any plausible necessity for such a mode of obtaining support for religion so much like taxation,

argues a depraved state of affairs. But more particularly this system presents objectionable features,—

1. In its injustice towards individuals.
2. In its injuriousness to the real interests of the Church; and
3. In its being detrimental to the cause of the Gospel; impeding its advancement, and casting an unjust suspicion over the real object of its publication.

1. It is unjust in principle towards individuals; for while it may be easy for the one to pay for his one seat, the head of a large family must, for the very same opportunity, pay five or six times more, yet families do not instinctively bring with them five or six times more pecuniary means for the display of liberality. Then why carry on a system which must either raise unequal claims, and tempt some to the unworthy resort of seeking to evade the tax, or to proclaim themselves, on account of their families, the poor of the congregation? In cases where the opulent individual is the one seat-renter, and the other with cramped means the individual who pays rent for a family, the discrepancy more evidently appears. Yet it must not be forgotten that these payments *are to be understood to be voluntary contributions!* And so also is a *congé d'élire* to be understood to be a *voluntary election*. But who that knows anything of the wise instructions of the Apostles will conclude that such absurdities can be the legitimate fruit of apostolic precept?

2. Let us suppose the case, that the opulent one seat-renter is the mere hearer, but the other, who has a

large family, the poorer person, and poorer still on account of his family : the injustice assumes a further degree of turpitude in becoming injurious to the real interests of the Church. Those who are the contributors to the maintenance of public worship for themselves or others, have a right to determine what that worship shall be, and who shall be its ministers. And, however this principle may be repudiated, facts are continually occurring which demonstrate the reality of its operations.

If circumstances are so arranged that the chief dependence must be placed upon the will of the mere hearer, there is nothing to prevent the Church from being dictated to by those who are either unworthy to make a part of it, or scorn to become such. Besides fostering a worldly spirit in the officers of the Church, this system tends to create a classification or *caste* amongst the members of the Church, diametrically opposed to that spirit of brotherhood which members of the same Church should bear towards each other ; and exactly of the same character with that which predominates in the world. Why should the Christian be distinguished in the Church, for the purpose of degradation, because his worldly portion is scanty ? That fact is galling enough, without adding insult. “ My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment ; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay

clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place ; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool : Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts ? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him ? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment-seats ? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called ? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well : But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy ; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (James ii. 1—13.)

3. This system of seat-renting, or taxing, is *detri- mental to the cause of the Gospel generally*, by placing an impediment in the way of its advancement, and by casting an unjust suspicion upon the gracious benefits of the Redeemer. Why should the perverted ingenuity of man be allowed to step in and invalidate that command of our Lord, "*Preach the gospel to every creature,*" by presenting to the invited world a closed

door, to be opened only by a silver key? This turns the House of God into a house of merchandise, and demands that corresponding means be taken to prevent any delinquent from stealing the bread of life. "*Charity suffereth long, and is kind,*" saith the Apostle (1 Cor. xiii. 4.); but not so when this system prevails: if the unconverted hearer cannot speedily make up his mind to pay for "*coming to the light that his deeds may be reprov'd,*" this system speedily bars his further attendance at Wisdom's gates, and deprives him of the benefit of those means which tend to conversion. It is a short-sighted policy that, for fancied present gains, cuts off the future enlargement of the Church, and changes the call made to the unconverted, by causing it to be truly *with money and with price*. It is true that, in some of our Churches, those who cannot pay the tax are accommodated, or rather distinguished, by a degraded separation, and sometimes further insulted by being confined to the most draughty or ill-constructed seats that perverted ingenuity could have suggested. I know, I may be met with the interrogatories, *What! must not the place be maintained? would you not support the ministry?* And to such I would answer: that these questions imply a considerable want of principle either in the officers of the Churches or in the Church members themselves; which is manifest by the supposed necessity for their recurrence to a mode which is un-Apostolic. And further, that the inquirers overlook facts now in existence, which demonstrate that there is no necessity to recur to an un-Christian mode

of raising what may be necessary. Many very large societies for religious objects are subsisting around us, supported by means of voluntary contributions far greater than any which our churches need raise for their maintenance; and yet they have no seats to tax.

III. The last instance I shall produce of departure from apostolic rule is this, that the official gifts of the Church for its edification are systematically circumscribed and confined to one person. The temporal matters, the least worthy objects of the Church's attention, are very carefully and very properly committed to a college of deacons; but the spiritual edification of *all* the members of the Church is *provided* for in a very different way, but not like those employed by the Apostles, or practised by the Churches under their rule. For if you will turn to your Bible you will find that the Church at Ephesus, had a plurality of bishops (Acts xx. 17—28), so had that at Philippi (Phil. i. 1); so, also, had the Churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts xiv. 21—23). And the Apostle Paul was so careful to have this secured to the Churches, that he left Titus in the island of Crete to see this adopted in every Church there, young as they were, and, as may be supposed, without the advantage of being able to apply to a neighbouring college for well educated and gifted pastors (Tit. i. 5.). The apostolic directions to Titus form part of our Scriptures given by inspiration, which, together with those written for the then use of Timothy, who was, probably, in similar circumstances, are recorded for our admo-

tion and instruction. There is no evidence to prove that the Apostle ever considered that one Church should have no more than one minister. When our Lord sent out the Apostles to preach the Gospel, and when the Holy Ghost called upon Churches to send forth missionaries, you find a plurality sent forth together to the same places (Mark vi. 7; Luke x. 1; Acts xiii. 1—3.) In fact, there is not an example in the New Testament of a Christian Church with but one bishop; and what reason have we to warrant the supposition that this order has been divinely rescinded? Has the world become less tempting, and human nature more spiritual, to allow of relaxation in instrumentality? or has the Church become less gifted and less zealous, more lukewarm, and more carnal? That this one-man system of our Churches is not an essential feature of our acknowledged polity, will appear from the following extract taken from the Declaration of Faith, Church Order and Discipline of the Congregational or Independent Dissenters, published 1833. Art. 5 runs thus:—
“They believe that the only officers placed by the Apostles over individual Churches are bishops and deacons, *the number of these being dependent upon the numbers of the Church.*” Yet, however rich, however numerous, and however zealous our Churches may be, do they not carefully evade, or unthinkingly omit, to have a college of bishops? They will do many good things to forward the interests of religion, but they never seem to think that the apostolic constitution of having several efficient pastors in each

Church, worthy of a moment's consideration as a *good plan*. They have *other* plans to which they give the preference. They never regret their inability to have more than one pastor, though they frequently show their regret at his inefficiency, by changing him for *one* they like better. I have referred to this corruption as deteriorating the interests of the Church, but it equally militates against the character and usefulness of the pastors; and were I to proceed to unmask the complication of errors which lie crouched under the fairest face of this wretched system, the exposure would be deemed invidious, and my strictures severity itself. We may pride ourselves in deriving our polity and order from the New Testament, and happy for us were it altogether so; but is it any recommendation of our intelligence in this matter, that we can cordially uphold the system which is *a main stay, the very back-bone of individual Church order in those established by the State?* Wherever there is the important *one* stationed, he is the centre of everything which is valued,—the loadstone by whom and for whom are all things known in their Churches. And this *one-man system* has so thoroughly penetrated the arrangements of our Churches, that the legal trusts under which the properties of those Churches are held are, in many instances, saturated with this erroneous idea—*one Church, one minister*—and its concomitant errors. And I have no reason to conclude that these kind of trusts are rare, but every reason to consider them to be a fair sample of the whole. Of course these must present

impediments in the way to a return to apostolic practice ; but not so formidable as those presented by that obstacle couched in the complaint of the Prophet Jeremiah—" But my people *love* to have it so." (Ch. v. 31.) If human expedients had not stepped in to deprave both ministers and people, this state of things would not so long have continued, nor would the polity of the New Testament have been strange to our members and to our Churches.

These instances of defalcation in our Churches, I deem amply sufficient to warrant the conclusion that they do not display that adherence to apostolic principles which their profession of obedience, intelligence of character, and zealous watchfulness would lead us to expect ; but that *they are virtually controlled and governed by principles inimical to apostolic Church order—they need reformation.*

THE RENEWED CHURCH DESCRIBED.

Having despatched my complaints, I come now to the more agreeable task of defining or describing what I deem to be the positive features of a sound and healthy Church of Christ, and that which ought to be the object of our desire and aim. In the first place, I would remark, that it must be such a Church as does not participate in the corruptions already noticed, but which has, on the contrary, those virtuous qualities which are, by the means of those corruptions, excluded from the category of accustomed Church qualities. In the next place, I would pre-

mise, that, as every part of the Divine will is strictly accurate, so that there is nothing jarring or inconsistent between Divine principles and practices; the same truth should be effectually manifested in all the arrangements of such a Church, so that "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report," (Phil. iv. 8), shall be the correct summary of the Church's Order, in precept and practice. And further, that as we have reference to a Church, which is a collective company of God's people, we have to describe what such are in their open and public doings as a Church. The prevalent spirit of which forms their character, which character is to be known by no other means than the fruit they bear, which cannot but be manifest and known to all who may be the spectators of their proceedings and order. This is the office I volunteer to perform; and shall, therefore, depict those visible observations and institutions among such a body, as will evidence that there is a spirit of life of no ordinary kind, but that which is the gift of the Redeemer, and watered by the dew of the Holy Spirit.

I. The first remarkable feature in such a Church will be this: that every Lord's day shall witness them assembled jointly to commemorate the dying love of their Redeemer, unitedly to worship at His footstool, and to testify their willingness to contribute of their substance, as God may have respectively blessed them, to sustain their own community in its full integrity as

a Church of Christ. You shall behold their earnest desire to be individually built up in the faith, and unitedly know their real state as a people ; to rejoice with those who shall have true cause for rejoicing, and to weep with those whose circumstances present just occasion ; and to attend to the voice which God may in his providential dealings address to them. They shall attentively listen to the details which the deacons or the bishops may deem it their privilege to submit to the consideration of so holy a community. On the one hand, the deacons shall be eager to make the Church acquainted with the extent of its liberality, and how many good objects it has promoted ; and it may be, at times, to check its exuberant liberality, because more than enough ; and at other times, simply to state the unsupplied wants of God's cause. Which wants shall be met by an unostentatious liberality, strangely contrasting with the old state of things, when little was to be expected unless by some peculiar play upon their fancies, appeals to their heated imaginations, and an excitement of their sympathies ; by far-fetched and cunningly contrived cases, they were cheated into something like liberality : so cleverly extorted, yet so sillily yielded, as to teach every discreet man to lament that ever the occasion should occur, or it may be to tempt him to think of endowments. Besides which, their pastors, in addition to feeding the Church with sound knowledge, shall put in their claim also, unitedly to gratify themselves in detailing to their fellow-members the progress of the work of God amongst them, the

inroads made upon the kingdom of Satan; or, should there be cause for admonition, to warn, to exhort, to urge, to hold fast and hold on to the right cause, or to return to their first works. Perhaps some may be disposed to treat this description as an exuberance of the imagination, and never fit to be actually realized. Let such attend to the following descriptions, given by the Apostle Paul, of the mystical Church of Christ, of which individual Churches are the miniature representations, and a careful consideration of their contents will correct such erroneous impressions; "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with

simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." (Rom. xii. 1—16.) Another passage, from the Apostle's Epistle to the Corinthians: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, were where the hearing? If the whole were hearing where were the smelling? But now God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many mem-

bers, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee : nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary : and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour ; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need : but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked : that there should be no schism in the body ; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (1 Cor. xii. 12—27.) In this manner writes the Apostle to the Church at Corinth. These are long quotations to make, but, considering the important bearing they have upon the subject, I could not allow myself to rest satisfied with barely referring to them. They must be read to be of any service.

II. Having sketched out the general features of the Church, let us take a view of its institutions in the combination of its officers into two colleges, that of the bishops or elders, and that of the deacons. These officers are to be the known and respected members of the Church, the faithful exemplars of its gifts and graces, freely chosen by the Church out of the many of whom that may be at times composed, and in whom the apostolic delineation of character and qualifications

shall be their recommendation; the paramount or sole recommendation acknowledged by this Church, and left upon record for the use of all Churches by the Apostles (1 Tim. iii. 1—13; Tit. i. 5—9; Acts vi. 1—6). But I must not proceed to delineate personal character and qualifications. My business is, to describe what they unitedly exhibit. It would be easy to extend my anticipations of what they will be in the renewed Church, were I to permit myself freely to state their negative qualifications. For propriety of conduct appears the more distinguishing as it is set off against the crooked doings of perversion, or the grotesque attitude of error. Yet I must acknowledge this not the high-road marked out for my course of observation; these errors and these perversions are not to be known so as to characterize either the college, or bishops, or deacons. I will, therefore, limit myself to occasional touches upon bygone doings, only as a foil to set off the renewed state of things, and by means of this salt maintain the relish for the recital.

You will see that in these respective colleges of bishops and deacons, there will be a prevailing and enlightened attention to their respective departments; no hard bargains struck in these matters to trench each other in; no understood arrangement, that on one side there shall be all the pay, while on the other there is all the power. But each shall allow the other to manage their respective departments, fully conscious that their personal zeal and love to their Redeemer's cause will carry them very far beyond what common

expectation (although reasonable) might desire. And that their known intelligence, maturity, and experience, will not need to be hedged in from breaking bounds. No more fear that the bishops will suppose they are taking care of the flock over which God has placed them when they are dictating obedience to some childish arrangements of their own, or challenging personal respect by conduct the reverse of that which is amiable. They will rule the flock by leading them to good pasture. Pasture not deteriorated by the noxious weeds of error, or so poor as scarcely to afford nourishment. But being "Scribes well instructed" in things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven, and "soldiers" prepared to hazard all for the cross of Christ, and "householders" who have laid up in store things new and old, they will, from time to time, nourish and build up the Church in faith and every good work. By means of there existing a plurality of pastors, no soul will be overlooked through personal poverty or privacy, nor through the flock extending in numbers beyond the capacity of its officers; and the case of every one within the precincts of the Church will receive that due culture, by means of the college of pastors exhibiting a combination of graces and gifts to meet every emergency. The whole exhibiting a consolidation of suitable strength for the accomplishment of the most glorious of works, and displaying, not a pretended, but a real efficiency.

It may, perhaps, be considered as a likely drawback upon all this representation, that there existing a

plurality in the same offices, they may misunderstand each other. And what if they should? These men are not to be classed with children or with triflers, but with men in earnest, determined to throw in their whole souls to promote the greatest of all objects, and will such men allow themselves to be diverted from their intention by subordinate considerations? A difference arising from other considerations must involve the Church in the question, and can be settled by making use of what the Apostles have delivered as to the qualifications of officers and members, and the decision of the Church, duly apprised of all, will determine to which side of the question they will abide. And the benefit of having a well exercised, enlightened, and thoroughly instructed Church, will then most admirably appear. No better foil could be desired to illustrate the superiority of the renewed Church over that of the pitiable incompetence of what such have been. The very intelligence of the Church, unitedly considered, will cast a halo of respect around. The rays will illuminate even the bishops themselves, and for ever keep aloof from that college the man who shall fancy by his election to office, that *he has condescended to husband the Church.*

We will now turn our attention to the standing memorials of the intelligence, zeal, piety, and disinterestedness of the efficient college of pastors. You will not meet with a soul belonging to the Church, however adverse his worldly condition may be, or however small his natural attainments, but what has his graces cherished, his knowledge increased, and his spiritual

love drawn out, by the self-denying labours of these good shepherds. And that by means and methods known only by those who have the same zeal, and the same intelligence, and the same assiduity ; and who, like them, have been taught by God the wisdom of ruling a Church well, by opening the eyes of the flock and teaching them to understand their real interests, and the difference between truth and error, childhood and manhood. Thus they edify the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. Further, they train up the Church perpetually to manifest the glory of God : for they sedulously seek to commit the same word of truth which they minister to faithful men of the flock, who shall be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. ii. 2). And they not only pray to the Lord of the harvest, but they do what the Lord of the harvest has taught is wanting to provide labourers for his harvest. Hence you perceive that they are sure to discover the gifted among the flock, whether poor or rich. Or, however forbidding and unlikely their exterior for this purpose might appear to the ordinary beholder, they have means and methods suggested by wisdom, and pursued by sanctified zeal, to purify the precious metal. These they strengthen and encourage by suitable instruction, faithful counsel, and kind exercise, drawing out their gifts to a healthy maturity. And thus they prepare a multitude of gifted men to stand in readiness, thoroughly furnished for every good work, that when occasion offers they may be found ready.

Because I speak of these doings as the act of the

pastors, do not suppose I mean to imply that they are executing these things without the concurrence of the Church. By no means. This Church is an enlightened Church; it knows as well the sinews of its strength as it does the inlets to corruption. It understands as well the boundaries of its duties as it does the precious gifts bestowed upon it by the great Head of the Church for its edification. And the communion of this Church with Christ being direct, they never waver in their allegiance, or fear that he will some time or other desert them, so as to oblige them to seek a continuance of life by extraneous means. They work while it is day, and carefully "occupy" that position to which Christ has graciously advanced them. As no Christian will choose to live for himself or his own good only, no more will a Church of Christ, composed of such characters. It is true Churches may present the anomaly of barely existing, just as an ignorant or uncultivated person may present the appearance of having no other faculties than those for eating and drinking. Yet this Church not only takes very proper care of itself, but extends its concern for the benefit of others, and that by tangible means. It is not ignorant of its own strength, nor unaccustomed to make use of all its faculties; and this enlightened and well-trained Church has its range of duties commensurate with the richness and variety of its endowments.

It is true, efforts to a certain extent, and of a certain kind, must be proportioned to pecuniary means, and the unskilful and the ignorant are too

apt to mistake what are the requisite means for the contemplated objects. But as intelligence reigns through this Church, so when money is wanting, the college of deacons are well aware of the resources of the Church; and men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, they never desire what is not really wanted, nor advise the Church to do what will not facilitate the end aimed at; and hence, by confidence and prudence rather than wealth, no pecuniary means are wanting to carry on their exemplary works.

This Church, abounding in graces and well-matured gifts, is not indifferent to the darkness around it, but does, by well-arranged efforts, contrive to keep up the light of the Gospel blazing in sundry localities; and thus attracts the sinner to the cross, and introduces to the Church such as are ordained to eternal life.

But the range of their illumination is not confined to their immediate locality, no, nor yet for the purpose of merely adding to their own numbers; they go beyond their own personal sphere; they know of no limits to their exertions but the globe itself, and no place on that globe do they consider beyond the precincts of the message of truth. This Church possesses amongst its members the well-trained soldiers of the cross, whom no difficulties can deter, nor dangers daunt. Need I add, that they *do* carry the Gospel to remote lands; that they *do* attack the strongholds of Satan; that they *do* chase away ancient clouds of darkness, and *do* set up here and there kindred Churches to pursue and carry on the like good cause to the end of time.

And thus, while they can afford to extend the means of grace to an unlimited extent, the Church at home remains strong in itself, by the grace of the Lord: in the efficiency of its officers, and in the numbers of its members, a large proportion of whom, gifted and well-trained, are growing up TO PERPETUATE ITS VERDURE AND ITS BLESSINGS.

LECTURE II. .

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANS FOR THE GROWTH OF A
CHURCH OF CHRIST.

It now remains to delineate that line of action which, in the exercise of sound reason and competent zeal, will issue in fully, fairly, and freely exemplifying the Apostolic or New Testament Church Order. There may be two methods of proceeding about this work of Church revival; the one by seeking a restoration of that which exists, by removing its diseases, and restoring it to the healthy constitution of the New Testament standard; the other, by forming a new Church and carefully watching and tending the growth, that nothing noxious claim kindred and alliance with it to its detriment. Of the eligibility of these two, my decided opinion is that the last is to be preferred. Without entering into a detail of reasons which direct me to this conclusion, I would merely state that if you will proceed by the latter method, you will not shut yourselves out from benefiting the bewildered. As composed of thinking individuals, they can be approached by means of principles fairly brought

home to their minds; and as represented by public communities of Christians, they are not to be influenced but by like bodies. When they can see and read your character, your principles, your blessings, and your advantages, in your collective and organized position as a Christian Church, to be far superior to their own, you will behold the masses wonderfully convinced of what, by all your debating, and arguing, and planning, you never could have brought them to see. Do not, therefore, allow yourselves to think, that because you select this course, you are separating yourselves from those whom you wish to benefit, and leaving them to their darkness. By no means: this is the most direct road to speak to them. What they will want will be *facts*. Argument, or even principle, is very little heeded when addressed by a supposed enemy to one who is very well satisfied with his own ideas. It is most probable that those who are unfavourable to your object may press you to demonstrate the practicability of what you contend for: and the more inimical will not be disposed to allow you either sufficient time or favourable circumstances. It would be exceedingly gratifying to meet the requisition with a speedy and successful demonstration, and it is but right you should do the noble work. If others will not, be you the pioneers. You were the first in the field; may you ever keep ahead in the forthcoming revival. If Paul plant, and if Apollos water, and success follow, it is of God. Be you, therefore, found fellow-workers together, and faithful stewards of what he has committed individually to each of you,

that whether your enterprise receive his blessing of prosperity or not, he may certainly say of each of you, with commendation, "*You have done what you could.*"

The advice which I am now about to offer, to forward the formation and maturity of a Christian Church, contemplates, as the ultimate object of those endeavours, the agreeable reality of witnessing a large and prosperous Church of the Redeemer evidencing a gracious vitality, and walking in all Christ's ordinances blamelessly: a light in the world, and a blessing far and near. And that such shall transmit to their posterity successively their uncontaminated privileges, as a people to hold forth the truth. Now such a cause and interest cannot be raised without the following four great departments of social economy having their just play and development:—

I. In the living materials of which it is composed.

II. In the circumstances of locality where they assemble.

III. In the pecuniary means.

IV. In the prevalent aim of such a combination of individual effort.

It is now my intention to lay before you an epitome or brief description of the objects contemplated by each of these departments of economy, and then to point out the progressive steps by which the full maturity of each may be attained. By knowing the lowest state of existence in which each of these objects may exist, you may come to know the reality of their existence, and their lowest germinating point; and by

keeping in mind the separate stages of advance, you may be prevented from stopping short of full realization, and know, during the term of advancement, how to command with effect your own instrumentality. One grand obstacle which many impose upon themselves to the defeat of the purport of all their endeavours, is the permitting themselves to enjoy the contemplation of some desired object, without enlightening themselves as to their real position in the way of instrumentality, and inseparable concomitants of such realization. Thus, many dream of competence all their days, but never realize it; because they never took the initiating steps to obtain it, consequently are never in a position to find it; and others allow themselves unthinkingly to shut every avenue by the means of which it might be theirs. Knowledge is strength when that is the knowledge of wisdom, which has a hand to work with as well as a head to direct; for by it the weakest as to means are taught what they *really* want to make their weakness grow into strength, and how to nurture up the germs of vitality to full maturity.

In the *first* place, consider what the living materials are of which a Church must be composed. *These are true Christians who intentionally assemble themselves together for the purpose of walking in Church order, according to Christ's word, and who are individually willing to promote the edification of the whole by every means in their power.* The last few words may at first sight seem too grasping; but it should be observed that they are limited by

two qualifications, both of which are in the individual's own power: that of his being *willing*, and that such means must be for *the edification* of the whole. It would be an unhappy circumstance to obtain even a goodly number of real Christians to meet and unite together for the purpose of forming a Church, who possessed so little intelligence as not to perceive that they could in any way advance the prosperity of the whole, or who were so half-hearted, so lukewarm, or so selfish, as not to be willing to do what they could, and what they *thought proper*, for the purpose. At all events, if such were to be among you at your first formation, it is to be hoped that the better materials would preponderate, both in numbers and influence, otherwise it would be a most forbidding commencement. I would never advise you to reject any whom you could not but believe to be saints. No congregation can expect to be without those who are ever identified with sundry disagreeable circumstances; and, consequently, it is not by exclusion that you can ever obtain a company of fellow-members, upon none of whom you can ever look but with unalloyed satisfaction. No: other means must be adopted; never forget you are in a warfare; you have corruptions within, ever striving to overcome better sentiments. Only learn how to keep complete command over yourselves, and you will find that your self-possession will afford you ample means to meet the most disagreeable without disgust, and without fear that any consequences, injurious to your community, will result from the connection. Every man

who has the full command of himself, is sure to make way, though under adverse circumstances. The mode may vary ; but the issue is certain. Let all unite, therefore, determined—but without any dereliction of principle—both by precept and example, by information, and by exertions, to promote the edification of the whole ; and you will soon find that that which is disagreeable will make way for everything that is otherwise.

Now, if you keep in view the definition of the materials composing a Church of Christ, and add these other circumstances : *That such have united themselves together, are organized with all the officers appointed by the Redeemer, do keep up in active operation every institution or means for the edification of the whole, and are considerable in numbers, and extensive in the influences of their graces and their efforts*—you have, then, those material requisites which compose an exemplary Church of Christ. And such should you covet to be. But this can never be attained at once. A Church is a living body, capable of degrees of maturity, the most elevated of which is to be obtained by successive advances of growth. You must first be humble enough to be the infant, or else you never can acquire the higher and more advanced state. I refer to Churches in their collective character and attainments. I wish you to take particular notice of this remark respecting the infancy of a cause. The not seeing the propriety of this, is the reason why so many refuse to co-operate to regenerate a cause. And the dislike of growing circumstances

leads very many to rest satisfied when they have attained, by artificial means, a degree of growth—the unhealthy life of a sickly infant—and never get better than to possess a kind of lingering existence. And how many Churches are in this state at the present day? Be sure you keep yourselves in the employment of none but legitimate means of edification; and you will certainly find the development of the full proportion of gifts which the Lord may have been pleased to bestow upon your community.

Now, we will suppose you are able to compose a little assembly, in numbers sufficient to make a meeting upon every ordinary occasion. You will, therefore, assemble together without officers, and without any further organization than the sincere intent and the simple act of communing in the Lord's Supper; and by reading and speaking to each other of those things which concern your everlasting welfare, exercise such means as you do possess to edify each other. There are so many circumstances in which an infant cause may be placed, as to render an attempt to lay down specific rules in these cases of edification almost impossible; for the whole range of the ways and means to draw forth and to mature the knowledge and the gifts of individuals must be included, as well as the ordinary and stated means. And, therefore, all I can say here must be, not to despise the day of small things, nor despair of seeing the gifts of one and another opening and enlarging. Gifts improve by exercise. Having continued in this state until it is manifest that among yourselves some exhibit cer-

tain qualifications described by the Apostle Paul, and which you will find in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, you will have advanced in maturity so as no more to be the infant, but, like the Churches in Crete, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, when they for the first time produced officers. (Tit. i. 5 ; Acts xiv. 21—23.)

Therefore, you will be ready to commence another step in advance, by the election of officers for your further wellbeing. Your having been for some time in a state of infancy will have done this for your benefit,—that it will have proved who amongst you are the most likely to promote your further growth. An actual knowledge and experience of persons by your company, is far better than that which you could obtain from information embodied in the recommendations of one or two strangers. And to be able to rise superior to that certain mark of ignorance which instinctively prefers the strange prophet to the one at home, will demonstrate that you have passed your nonage, and are thriving in reality. I must now consider you with your officers as more organized, not more of a Church than before, but more efficient. Many things you must have had already attended to by one and another of your number spontaneously, and not by appointment : namely, such things as minuting your names, your subscriptions, and your resolutions ; by which such had before manifested their competence, and their faithfulness, and their zeal. Now the probability will be, those persons will be among the officers elected. And by the election of them to office, they will receive your acknowledgment of the

benefit of their services, and determination to give them your guarantee that they may never be weary in well-doing. Now, be careful to see that you do consolidate your exertions, and that your officers do exhibit the renewed ardour of youth, so as to get all those institutions or means for the instruction of the members in every grace and in every gift into active operation; and that your officers do *themselves improve*; for if they do not themselves improve in efficiency, and you seek by other means to advance your cause, either by catching at numbers or otherwise, you will be likely to commit a fatal error. As you were in your infancy at first without officers, so your officers will have to continue in their infancy, until they have, by the maturity of their efforts, produced a favourable effect upon the body at large. You will be at liberty to *add* to your officers. So that you can proceed adding fresh strength to your colleges of office-bearers, until the whole presents a harmonious combination of every gift and every grace that should adorn a Church.

After this, the greater increase of the Church may be expected; and it may be the work of the day (after being thus prepared) to welcome accessions. Recollect that this of increase, though it is not to be neglected, yet is not the chief point to be urged before you are as a company matured, and as an organized body exercised in every good word and work. The more the people are in numbers, the more work there will be in every proper department of the Church. And if you employ means to draw and

collect multitudes before you have the power to meet all their requirements, your popularity may prove your ruin ; and in some cases it must checked.

You may, perhaps, be desirous to know how long a course of time this process would occupy ; to which I would say, that it depending upon circumstances, over which you could not have an absolute control, the duration must be regulated by facts as they transpire ; and, therefore, no definite period can be assigned. But do not allow yourselves, for this cause, to be discouraged. It is only once in a life that infancy occurs ; and a Church is a never-dying community. The grand end *of its organization* is, that it may possess that vitality which may carry on its existence to the end of time. The mature life of a healthy Church is a great object, therefore be not sparing in zeal and endeavours to secure a good foundation. If the Lord should bless you with ample assistance, it may be a far shorter work than that of raising an ordinary one-minister Church. But whether short or long, recollect that the prosperity of your individual souls is not to be involved in any delay ; your personal growth may be great, though, as a united body, not strong. And let those whose souls flourish have recourse to the holy means well known to the praying Daniels and wrestling Jacobs, and God will appear.

Two more remarks, and then I will conclude this head : The one relating to the number of members which should compose a Church, the other to the number of its office-bearers. We find no number any-

where laid down in Scripture for the former, therefore conclude that they are bounded by relative circumstances of existence and convenience; that there be enough always to make a meeting, yet not more numerous than can conveniently meet in one place every Lord's day. They may, therefore, range from half a dozen individuals to two or three thousand. As to the number of the officers, it is nowhere limited in Scripture, except in the case of election of deacons. (Acts vii.); when the Apostles directed them to choose *seven*. Take this in connection with the fact, that in that Church there were the Apostles, and many pastors and teachers (Acts xiii. 1), and it would seem that the relative importance of the duty to be discharged demands a larger number of bishops than deacons.

In the *second* place, you must pay specific attention to the requisite circumstances of *locality where the Church is to assemble*. Locality is an essential concomitant of Church existence, because composed of material persons, and because these persons, to become a Church, must assemble together, and form one congregation. And by a necessary consequence, the further convenience of a suitable building follows. Of course the place will be where you can gather the Church, and where the Church chooses to assemble. But, supposing you had to select a locality, let it be as near as you can judge the centre of the range of the residences of the members, and easy and ready of access on every hand. The building which you will want on this site must be every way adapted to

answer the purposes which a fully organized and active Church would require for its various meetings and officers. Regard paid to these matters is important, inasmuch as the building is part of the necessary machinery you must employ to accomplish your glorious objects. This place, or building, should comprise a large room for the meetings of the Church, and smaller rooms for each of the two colleges of officers, in which they may meet to transact their duties, and where the members of the Church may at all proper times meet with them. Other rooms for Committees of the Church, class meetings, and other meetings of the Church members for the edification of themselves and others. Also, a commodious reading-room, with library, for the use of the Church and its officers. In addition to which, the Church should possess buildings in the different neighbourhoods around the circle of its influence, in which every Lord's day, and at all other suitable times, the Gospel might be freely and constantly preached to all.

Now, all this machinery cannot be set in operation at first, nor could this be created but as the strength of the Church advances, hence we have to look to this summary of means as the fruit of combined prosperity and judicious zeal. The little band composing the infant Church will at first require only a room in which to assemble, and then as many other rooms as they can occupy with gifted members to hold forth the word of life to all. As the assemblies increase in numbers, so must the rooms be exchanged for those which are larger, and if all were public buildings, it would be preferable.

There is no absolute necessity that the meetings of the Church be open to any but themselves ; but those in which they hold forth the Word of Life must be so. It would be well if the Church could secure a freehold edifice for its own meetings ; as for the preaching stations, they would be more convenient if held year by year, or on lease. The benefit of securing one freehold will be this, that you may build what kind of edifice you may please, and will not be compelled to disburse more money upon it at a time, or all together, than may be convenient. Besides which, locality, being one of the requisites to compose a Church, you would thereby secure a focal point for perpetuity ; and should the Church members remove from the locality, the freehold might be transferred, so as to keep pace with the change of circumstances. But one caution must here be noted, that the trust-deeds of the Church must be drawn up with full knowledge of the Scriptural principles of the New Testament Church, that if the laws of our country should be adverse to any of their Scriptural rights and privileges, the case may be met by suitable arrangements, *without making a breach upon the Scriptural order of the Church*. I speak thus because I fear that very few, if any, trust-deeds belonging to our Churches, with reference to Church property, can be relied upon as true to our principles.

In the *third* place, the pecuniary means of the Church must have specific attention paid to them, in order that the economy of this department of Church requisites should be successfully developed. The

demands upon the liberality of a Church naturally class themselves into two heads,—those which are ordinary and constant, and those which are extraordinary, and depend more upon the peculiar circumstances of the Church than the former. The ordinary calls comprise the current expenses incident to keeping open places for the use of the Church, the maintenance and relief of their poor, and the remuneration to their officers. The extraordinary calls comprise those for the erection of buildings ; those requisite to maintain home and foreign Gospel missions, and those demands which the peculiar position of other Churches, or the cause of God in other parts, may require.

The infant Church would commence with having to meet the trifling incidental charges occasioned by their small meetings. Prudence would direct you, as possessing amongst you men of business, to know when, how, and to what extent those charges might be increased by greater accommodation and an enlarged sphere of operation. The poor should be next attended to. Afterwards, the surplus of the fair proportion of the foregoing charges should be the remunerating fees to the officers. And when these foregoing claims had been fairly met, the Church may be so strengthened as to be able to meet in some shape or other the extraordinary demands for their own consolidation and enlargement of action, and for the progress of the Gospel around and abroad.

Some may think it altogether preposterous to say how money shall be disposed of before they have it ; but let it be remembered that the accumulation of

wealth never imparts to the possessor enlarged, or liberal, or judicious ideas, but everything that is mean. It is very true none can command wealth, but every Christian should, before he can fear that he may have his faculties screwed up into littleness by its receipt, take advantage of his impartial state of mind, and lay down good rules for its judicious management if it should come. And believe me this is one way to attain it. If you, as a Church, do not have your principles in these matters consolidated and fixed beforehand, you will never be the better for your abundance. The claims of a pecuniary nature are not only relative, and therefore controlled by circumstances, but they have the dangerous quality of transposing men's thoughts; and therefore aware of their deceitful nature, provide yourselves with sound financial principles in time. I would observe, with respect to the mode of raising these necessary sums, that they should be free contributions, by or through the Church members, made every Lord's day at the time of their assembling. The members should be made acquainted with the full amount so contributed, and the manner of its disbursement. And the officers should enable them, by a candid and unsuspicious report, to exercise their own free and unbiassed judgment as to the necessity of each case, to contribute accordingly. And lastly, with respect to the sums paid to the officers, it should be remembered that, while this mode would not prevent the raising of large sums of money if the people were wealthy and the cause needed it, these plans, if

adopted, would preclude the necessity for the Church to deal or bargain with, or say anything of pay to, those whom they might select from time to time to add to the colleges of officers. What was raised for that purpose would be known, and hence the candidates would be aware whether or not they could sustain the duties of their office with the remuneration ordinarily made from time to time; if such could not, they would only have to make way for others who could, and the Church would not be drawn into any transaction which might be a mere commercial negotiation. And by this means the Church could from time to time add, as they thought proper and had ability, to their home office-bearers, or to their missions.

In the *fourth* and last place, the prevalent aim of such a combination of individual effort should be carefully considered, and duly carried out in practice. The aim or object of Church organization is simply the glory of God in men's spiritual edification; and the widest and most extensive sphere, the bringing home the truth to every individual in its utmost extent. But in the first place, in the infant Church the edification of its own members must be the grand object of its hopes and aims, and everything that would militate against this must be avoided: afterwards extend it to others, and others, and others, as means and instrumentality shall be in the power of the Church.

To enter more into detail and particulars would give me great pleasure, but would be beyond the

extent to which I propose to limit myself in these Lectures, and, perhaps, would be entering into matters which could be better detailed when all the real circumstances were in view. You who intend to work your energies to promote the growth of the Church, see that you keep your attention constantly fixed upon these four grand departments of economy; and by judicious advice and zealous endeavours, see that these are brought to keep pace with each other, and to produce, in due time, the utmost your enlarged hopes may have encouraged you to expect. Upon the Church members in general, and upon the bishops and deacons specially, devolves the duty of leading the Church onwards. "In the multitude of counsellors, there is safety." But be careful that every step is a step in advance; do not allow a supposed advance to supersede or destroy what has been previously obtained: better remain *in statu quo* until you really can advance. Be not deceived by appearances, for it not unfrequently occurs that the originators of new interests, by not judiciously proportioning their superstructure to their foundation, involve the affairs in ruin, and are ultimately glad to surrender to others the harvest which they were instrumental in sowing. Beware, therefore, that you never allow your own zeal, or the equivocal excitement from competitors to urge you beyond *the real strength* of your cause. Very many other points and circumstances I might call your attention to besides what I have here stated, but further reference to these matters I fear would be burthensome, and, perhaps, appear like dictation.

I feel confident that the hints and suggestions already thrown out, embody in themselves all that is necessary to complete a formal direction to make a beginning ; and with wisdom and Christian intelligence, the peculiar difficulties which may beset the path of any anxious to proceed aright will be safely met, and successfully removed. Therefore, in the strength of the Lord, let me urge you to commence the work.

To be successful herein, it will not only be requisite to command a sound judgment, practical efficiency for the attainment of the desired object by suitable means, together with favourable circumstances and good Christian materials, but also the special blessing of Christ, the great Head of the Church. And the best way you can manifest your sense of the paramount importance of His blessing is to proceed in humble reliance upon His teaching, His guidance, and His strength, to pursue that course which, in the humble exercise of the best of your faculties, He may enable you. Do what you believe to be in all things His will, without doubting, fearing, and lingering ; and see if He will not pour you out a blessing. Should He deny to you the gratification of prosperity, He may yet, by some other instrumentality, prove to you that His cause is advancing ; and it would be little better than childish, were you to repine because He had chosen other instruments than yourselves to effect that which all will be equally gratified in witnessing. A David prepared what a Solomon accomplished. And a Joshua completed what a Moses began. And I would not have you

feel surprised if called upon to witness many Church builders simultaneously striving by their zeal to out-strip each other; for when God pours out His spirit of revival upon His people, He is not sparing in raising up instruments. I think that the present are very equivocal times with respect to the real prosperity of the Churches of Christ. I may be mistaken. But, oh! that we may find that the genial influences of the spring have set in upon them to usher in a glorious harvest, and that the lowering aspect which has appeared to cover the minds of His people, was but the parting clouds of their winter season. And should God more copiously pour out his Spirit, you may be certain that those will be sifting times. The powerful influence of the Divine movements rouse very far beyond the boundaries of real vitality. The time when Christ became incarnate was the time when one false Christ after another arose. And when God raised up prophets, false ones abounded. And when Christ sent forth his Apostles, their paths were tracked by false apostles and deceitful workers. Do not expect, if it should appear that we are upon God's Church-building times, that the case will be otherwise. God does not advance His cause by the darkness of the night, or by the stealth of His marches, but by manifesting His omnipotence in the very face of the enemies' best strength. "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke x. 19.) Stand, there-

fore, prepared to proceed on God's work alone, if need be ; or, if in company with rivals, whether true or whether false to the good cause, see that you be behind them in nothing that your zeal, your sincerity, or your faith can commend. Permit not the idea of the novelty of the work, or of the object here set before you, to make you abandon it as chimerical. Remember how many great works were, in their first rise, subject to the like imputations. Cast your remembrance back to a few examples, taken from doings in the days which have been the brightest times of the Church. The sound idea of religious toleration was a novelty first broached in the time of the Commonwealth, and was opposed by Richard Baxter and many other worthies. The correct idea that those educated for the Christian ministry should be *pious* men, was a novelty which the founders of Homerton College dared to act upon. The impropriety of the connection between the Church and State was a truth more lately developed, and first proposed to the world about sixty years ago. Need I specify more instances of the slow development of practical truth? Look at the Bible Society, the Tract Society, the Missionary Societies, the Sunday Schools, and many others ; all new ideas in their day of small things, and in the judgment of the lukewarm and ignorant, *chimerical* ; but, by the blessing of God upon the labours of the intelligent and zealous, they are now great facts. Too long have the Churches of Christ lagged in the rear ; too long have they allowed others to supersede them

in the work of evangelization. Is it always to be so? If you do not advance to promote the cause of the Redeemer, He will employ others. The Gospel trumpet must be blown in the remotest regions of the earth. Why be behind in putting in your claim, to share in the honour of being instruments in your Redeemer's hands? *Christ has already given you His own plan for the accomplishment of the desired object. His ability effectually to bless His own instrumentality has never failed; and His promises are everlasting.*

Pity the nations, O our God,—
Constrain the earth to come;
Send thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.

We long to see thy Churches full,
That all the chosen race
May with one voice, and heart, and soul,
Sing thy redeeming grace.

**A CHURCH OF GOD;
ITS BENEFITS AND ITS MEMBERS:
DISPLAYING
THE ONENESS OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN
THEIR SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES, RIGHTS,
AND WORSHIP.
REASONS FOR EACH BEING FOUND WALKING IN
CHURCH FELLOWSHIP, AND
THE GREAT ENDS OF THE DIVINE INSTITUTION
OF CHURCHES.**

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

DEAR FRIEND,

The inquiry which you have propounded is a very important one. You say—"What benefits do you propose to yourself and others, by partaking in church membership? and who do you consider have a right to membership?" This inquiry I will briefly answer; but in so doing must take the liberty to transpose the two sentences of your inquiry, and answer the last part first. "Who do you consider have a right to membership?" To this I answer

—"They who have received power to become the sons of God,"—(John i. 11, 12, 13; Rom. xiv. 1—3,) and who besides this are able and willing to assemble with us in the name of Christ for the purpose of church fellowship; voluntary consent to walk together in all the ordinances of Christ being essential.—(2 Cor. vi. 14—16.) There are some Christians who have the right, but whom we must class with the unwilling, because they do not express their desire to unite with us for this purpose. And there are others prevented by circumstances which cannot be obviated by their being willing; these we class with the unable. Those, therefore, who are not subject to either of these impediments, will find their entrance to membership open, and meet with a welcome for Christ's sake.

And for this reason, that they are virtually one with us already. For there are principles pertaining to the spiritual life of such persons, which are like just so many links of an indivisible chain, inseparably connected; each of which principles develops itself by its proper fruit and effect; all of which serve as so many marks to testify to the vital union of each member of Christ's body. Notwithstanding the numerous changes to which the people of God are subject in worldly circumstances, and to variations in their attempts to fulfil His will, these principles testify to the essential oneness of the family of God.

These principles are succinctly presented in these words of the Apostle, writing to the Ephesians, "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one Hope of your calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all."—Eph. iv. 4, 5, 6.

All have had a divine call to salvation, and expect to be partakers of the same heavenly inheritance. "One Hope of your calling."

All have been redeemed by the same Saviour, and having been purchased at the price of His blood are His, and not their own. Christ is the Redeemer, Mediator, Master, and Lord of every one of them. "One Lord."

All these receive their salvation in the same way, by God's favour through faith, and not by their own works or merit. "One Faith."

All possess the Holy Spirit, who resides in each as in His temple. "One Baptism."

All have but one and the same God; the object of their worship, the source of their hopes, their friend, and their father.

These particulars pertain to every believing child of God, and are the rights and privileges of every member of the family: that "General assembly and church of the First-born whose names are written in heaven," to which all the people of God are being gathered, and from which there will be ultimately no absentees; but then the whole of these will be for ever with the Lord to behold His glory and to rejoice in His love. Even now they each partake more or less of the same spirit of love, the token of their being the habitation of the Holy Spirit. And after that faith and hope shall have been swallowed up in the realization of their inheritance, His love will then exist, and that for ever.—1 Cor. xiii.; 1 John iii. 10-15; v. 1-5.

These, therefore, are the persons who have a right to church fellowship on earth. And they have this right because God has qualified them. For a church is God's building, and it is His work; therefore must the materials of which it is to consist be composed of his own "living stones." And it is no small evidence of persons possessing this love to desire to unite cordially with the people of God for His glory in church membership. Those who possess not this love are unfit for building such a temple for the use of the God of heaven. Where this spirit is, there is liberty. Where it is wanting, 'there is *confusion* and every evil work.'

There is no good reason why every one belonging to Christ should not be joined in membership to a particular

church. It is an act of consistency : if they be "the children of the light," they should walk as such.

You may say, if church membership be a right, those who possess the right are certainly not compelled to exercise it. Such a conclusion would be a perversion of Gospel privileges. A Christian is not his own, but has been bought with a price, and, therefore, is called upon to glorify God with his body and spirit, for both belong to God—(1 Cor. vi. 20.) The non-exercise of Gospel rights amounts to unfaithfulness : such persons refuse to render to God that which he has trusted with them to employ for His glory, like the unfaithful servant with the one talent, who thought he had a right not to use it, and therefore returned it to his Lord safely wrapped up. Such reasonings do not become either a faithful or a wise servant. Shall God's privileges be despised because he thereby treats the sinner as a friend ? Does it become a son to despise his father's favours because they have originated from love ? Such must either suffer chastisement, to be restored to a right mind, or by non-correction left to take their own course, to discover the vanity of their profession. Esau despised his birthright upon the very same principle : what good will it do to me ? said he, and he forbore to esteem it ; and you know the consequence. When Moses considered that certain in his days desired to forego their right to participate in the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Be sure your sin will find you out." However we may estimate our religious proficiency, we must not overlook the fact that a low standard only will be attained by a neglect of Gospel church order.

But Christians are public persons, they who possess the spirit of Christ cannot live for themselves only : and they should consider how far they can overcome the natural bias of their old natures. Let them consider again the points of Christian obedience which they neglect by avoiding church fellowship. The glory of Christ is inseparably connected with the edification of His people. Now a Christian, by being found walking in church fellowship, manifests to the world his union with the General Church of Christ and his communion with all the family of God. He thereby manifests

ITS BENEFITS AND ITS MEMBERS.

the unity of God's family and his faith in the Gospel. And every particular church strengthened thus by the cordial co-operation of the people of God is the divinely prepared instrument for edifying "the body of Christ."

I know there is much diffidence and no little self-denial experienced by those who, for the first time, make attempts to join a church. "The old man" works hard to keep them out, and raises many imaginary perplexities. And for this cause it may be difficult at such times to decide whether they must not be classed with "the fearful and unbelieving," —(Rev. xxi. 8.) Should the fear, however, not arise from want of faith, but from the imperfect knowledge of what church order may imply, let such parties know that on their part they will not, by such a step, enter into any engagement incompatible with their free and spontaneous obedience due to the Lord. Nor will they lose any of their personal rights and liberties by so doing: but on the contrary will participate in many others which are secured by church fellowship.

Public societies are sometimes condemned even by friends when they *will* keep outside and exercise an outside judgment, which a sober examination would prove to be, as applied to the intended object, worthless. And, perhaps, such friends condemn the whole for the sake of that which would be at once remedied if they, instead of keeping aloof and condemning, would exercise their better judgment and co-operate. I need not apply this: a word to the wise is enough.

In answer to the other part of your inquiry, namely —"What benefit do you propose to yourself and others by partaking in church membership?" I say, The benefits we propose are those which pertain to the *nature* of a church of God; which are to be obtained through the *means* approved by God; and which are comprised in the *ends* designed by God in these institutions. The nature of a church being spiritual, pertains to the kingdom of heaven; consequently the

benefits will be spiritual. The means to be employed by the Church are those which are authorized by the Lord of the Church, and, therefore, the benefits to be received, will be obtained by a course of holy obedience; or waiting upon God in the use of these means. The ends of Church institution have respect to the completion of Christ's work of mediation, and therefore the end we look for, is to glorify Him our Mediator. Now His mediatorial work comprises two grand purposes. In the first place that sinners may be converted from the error of their ways, and introduced to the general Church of God. Secondly, that each of these persons may be edified, by means of his appointed ordinances, to the fulness of their spiritual stature.

In other words, we seek, by means of Church fellowship first, to manifest the glory of the great redemption in the extent of its sway, and, secondly, the blessedness thereof to ourselves by our increasing conformity to Christ in all things.

A church of God is an assembly and society called by his authority to continue in the spiritual duties of public prayer or calling upon God, of public instruction in His word, and of public fellowship, comprising participation in the Lord's Supper, united care and watchfulness for each other's spiritual interests and for the alleviation of those temporal ills which may fall to the lot of any of the members. These means Christ has sanctified, and by them will He accomplish His own gracious purposes.

We have encouragement to wait upon God in these services. To those who meet together in His name (that is by His authority) He has promised His presence. To those who agree together to pursue a common object agreeable to His will, He has promised to grant the desire of their hearts, —(Matt. 18.) Now, a church is not a transient meeting of friends, but a continuous assembling. And such an assembly

only can expect the fulfilment of this promise. It is, indeed, promised to such, for they who pray in faith must wait patiently for an answer. Hence the Church, which after praying continues to assemble patiently waiting for God's gracious answer, will, in his own time, be certain to receive it.

By the word God converts the sinner, and builds up the saint. In the former case, He makes His churches the means of gathering together His people to His one general church, and, in the latter case, he deepens and enlarges the sanctifying power of his truth in the souls of believers. We ourselves expect to be edified and built up in the truth, established in the faith, and confirmed in the hope of the gospel by waiting upon God in these exercises. And we also hope to be the honoured instruments in God's hands to bring home the good news of salvation to many brethren yet afar off, and thus be permitted to be co-workers in the honourable employment of manifesting the power of the Redeemer's work. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."—(Isaiah liii.)

How far indeed we may receive God's blessing for these ends time alone will reveal. Of this are we certain that if we are but permitted to help each other heavenwards, we shall hereby perform for each other a benefit of inestimable value. Yet we cannot confine our hopes of usefulness to this only. If God be with us, we shall accomplish a larger amount of good according to the greatness of His good pleasure. His promises are many and exceedingly great. From Him arise both the means and the blessing. Therefore, we deem we have a right to assume that, by faithfully improving the means He may be pleased to afford us, and, according to the extent of the blessing He may be pleased to grant to our instrumentality, He will further satisfy us with his good pleasure.

In conclusion, let me call your attention to the fact that the General Church of God on earth comprises all his particular and visible churches. And, notwithstanding the outward variations observable amongst them, there is an essential unity of all such by virtue of the relationship existing

A CHURCH OF GOD.

between Christ and each of the members who compose those societies. And further, there is a constant communion maintained by these churches with one another, and with the whole family of God in the fruits of that one faith, &c., possessed by the members. For through Christ we have an access by one and the same spirit to the Father, &c.—(Eph. ii. 18-22.) Prayer, in all the churches of God, is presented to one and the same object, even God the Father; proceeds from one and the same Spirit; is continually offered to God by the same High Priest and Intercessor before the throne of God. These prayers are continually offered up *by* all the churches *for* all the churches. So that there is no particular church of God in the world, nor a member pertaining to any one of them, excluded from participating in the benefits of this mediation. For all have the prayers of *all* God's churches continually offered in their behalf.

May the Lord add to this glorious company *now* ~~in~~ the land of faith; and may He enable you and the rest of His people to live in every respect compatibly with your high calling, is the earnest prayer of your friend and well-wisher in Christ,

H. W.

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